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Take the Drag Out of Your Walk

Q *We are about to bring home a young adult dog from the shelter. What's the safest way to introduce him to our three-year-old toddler and can we teach him a little pet etiquette?*

● Arden Moore ● Steve Brooks

YOUNG CHILDREN LEARN ABOUT THE SOCIAL world by watching others and modeling what they have observed. So it should come as no surprise that if you want children to learn how to treat pets, adults must be vigilant about modeling safe, appropriate relationships with dogs. At the age of three, children discover a range of social behavior including empathy, manners, and responsibility, to name a few... Remember, young children are still internalizing these concepts and shouldn't be expected to recall or even understand why they are important. It's up to you as parents to practice proper dog-human etiquette, so your children will follow your lead!

Optimally, before bringing your new dog home with children:

1. Parents and the dog (K9) should have an established relationship.
2. K9s should have previous experience behaving well around kids.
3. K9s should have a basic training foundation using force-free positive reinforcement techniques.



can learn to be their dog's 'helper'. Look for and reward your dog for good behavior. Positive reinforcement works on kids as well as dogs! 🐾

ARDEN MOORE hosts the Oh Behave weekly radio show on petliferadio.com. Is founder of the fourleggedlife.com pet community and creator of National Dog Party Day. **STEVE BROOKS (CPDT-KA)**, founder of Steve Brooks K9U has been teaching dogs a solid foundation of real-life manners, specializing in behavior problems for more than 20 years. stevebrooks9u.com.

FIRST, PAWS UP FOR ADOPTING A SHELTER DOG. To increase the odds of a safe, strong friendship forming between this dog and your toddler, I offer these guidelines.

Please note that your toddler is still in the "me-me-me" mindset. At this young age, children have not yet developed the concept of empathy. They have yet to learn how their actions (pulling a tail or ear or hitting a muzzle) may unintentionally inflict pain to a pet.

Play it safe by never leaving your toddler unsupervised in a room with your new dog. Even if your dog is super sweet, he may find himself in a fight-or-flight mode and pick the former action if handled too roughly by your young child.

Definitely enroll you and your dog in a positive reinforcement-style obedience class as soon as possible. Work with your dog to ensure he masters these very important skills: sits promptly when told, comes when called, heeds the 'stay' cue, drops a toy when asked, gently takes treats, does not guard his food bowl and greets visitors by sitting pretty and not jumping up on them.

Remember, dogs want to learn and they want to please. The key to any training success is to practice the three C's: be clear, be concise and be consistent. Make sure everyone (other than your toddler) honors the three C's to improve your dog's behavior, especially around your child. Decide if the words in the family should be *stay* or *wait*, *come* or *get over here*.

Conduct mini-training sessions, lasting 5 to 10 minutes a few times each day. Pick times when distractions are kept to a minimum and time them when your dog is hungry—makes for a better-motivated canine student!

Be encouraging and positive. Reward your dog with bite-sized treats and praise for behaving appropriately. Yelling or physically punishing your dog "caught in the act" will only heighten his anxiety and frustration levels – and worsen his behaviors. Take on the role of benevolent leader, the keeper of all good resources.

When raised safely together, your toddler and your dog will become fast friends and your child will enjoy a lifetime of wonderful memories of his first dog. 🐾

